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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development and implementation of a collaborative, interdisciplinary curriculum program, the Quest program. Implemented at a suburban New England high school, the program was loosely based on the tenets of the Coalition of Essential Schools. Ethnographical methodology included document analysis, participant observation, and interviews with participating teachers and students. After 1 year, several lessons about school change and collaboration were learned. First, the successes were accompanied by setbacks. Second, the experience highlighted the centrality of interpersonal issues; conflict abounded between the Quest teachers and college faculty. Third, if research is an agenda for a collaborating party, it undermines the true meaning of collaboration. Fourth, teachers need released time and support if they are to remain committed. Fifth, goals must be clearly defined. Overall, the findings demonstrate the slow, often painful nature of organizational change. (LMI)

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The Ordeal of Change: An Ethnographic Study of High School Reform

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The Ordeal of Change: An Ethnographic Study of High School Reform

This study presents the story of a 2 1/2 year collaborative, interdisciplinary curriculum project, called the Quest Program, which recently completed its first year of implementation at a suburban New England high school. The program, based loosely on the tenets of the Coalition of Essential Schools, resembles in many ways the growing number of grassroots change efforts in schools around the country: It was a project initiated by teachers, supported by administrators, and collaboratively designed with college faculty. This study, starting with the very first of the Quest planning sessions, documents through the lens of ethnography the evolution of a reform program and the slow, often painful process by which institutional change occurs. Using fieldnotes, key documents and semi-structured interviews, the study presents a candid picture of what school change looks like from the inside. In so doing, it investigates how reform takes hold, exploring those factors which inhibit change and those which propel it forward. The study concludes with a series of understandings that highlight the problematic nature of both instituting and researching such reform efforts.

The Ordeal of Change: An Ethnographic Study of High School Reform

This is the story of the Quest Program, a 2 1/2 year old interdisciplinary curriculum project which recently completed its first full year of implementation at a suburban high school. It is a story, I contend, which is being enacted in thousands of high schools across America, where the ideals of "Second Wave" reformers like Theodore Sizer have taken tentative hold. Though the particulars of Quest may differ from those of other reform programs being implemented throughout the country, the broad plotline of the story remains similar: Inspired by reform literature and rumors of improvement elsewhere, teachers band together to design an innovative curriculum, often involving interdisciplinary instruction and team teaching. College or university faculty are called in for support and guidance. Central office personnel speak with hope and enthusiasm about the teacher-initiated changes. Then the scenario begins to darken and grow complicated. Interpersonal issues thwart progress. Budgets dry up, leaving participants without financial support. Goals become vague or contradictory. The researcher, once seen as friend and collaborator, becomes recast as an encumbrance

or even an enemy. Within a year or two, the innovative curriculum has been watered down or compromised beyond recognition.

For reasons explored in this article, stories of programs like Quest rarely find their way into academic journals. And yet the understandings gleaned from such stories may represent the best support available to practitioners and researchers engaged in creating or studying school change efforts. They are object lessons in the vicissitudes of contemporary school change.

Background and Theoretical Framework

Over the past few decades, literature on staff development has come to radically rethink both the definition of successful school change and the criteria for achieving it. The "deficit" models of the 1950's and 1960's, in which teachers were viewed as passive recipients of outside expertise (Sarason, 1982), have long ago been replaced by conceptions of teacher development in which colleagueship, collaboration, and disciplined inquiry define the ideal (Lieberman, Miller, 1990). Since the publication of the Rand Study in 1977, it seems that a revolution has taken place in the way many schools define change and in the time frames they set for themselves in achieving it.

A good deal of that shift in attitude and practice can be attributed to the much-publicized success stories disseminated by Ted Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools (Sizer, 1984; Wiggins, 1986). Few university-based reform programs in recent decades have met with the

widespread interest generated by the Coalition. Indeed, it would be hard to find a program of innovation in the long history of school change that had been capable of engendering such enthusiasm on the part of teachers, often quite apart from their principals and superintendents. It is not the goal of this article to explore the reasons for this success. Suffice to say that the Coalition literature is rich with evidence of Copernican transformations in schools and in practitioners, and that the voluminous publicity issued by that organization functions as a kind of "inspirational literature" for grassroots reform. Like other writing in the inspirational genre, however, such staff development literature tends to focus almost exclusively on the positive, to make simple the complex, and to concentrate less on the arduous process than on the "happy" product of school reform efforts.

What is far less frequently presented are the stories of actual design and implementation of such faculty development projects in individual schools--stories which describe the often painful, always ambiguous process of reform (Bolin and Falk, 1987; Clift, Veal, Johnson, & Holland, 1990) This is true, I believe, for a number of reasons. First of all, depicting subtle, bottom-up change is very difficult to do in a brief and compelling way. Clearly, the progress and pay-off of old-style in-service training was easier to quantify and describe, if only because the entire enterprise--from goal-setting, to training, to implementation--happened within a controlled and limited framework. Indeed, top-down reform programs provided an ideal canvass for

traditional research, where lines of cause and effect were clearly drawn. Staff-generated faculty development projects, on the other hand, are a messy subject for study. Such programs have an organic and protean character that defy quantification, and often appear confounding even to the daily observer gathering voluminous fieldnotes. What works and why is a problem deeply embedded in the confluence of personality and program, site and political climate. While a project like ours clearly lends itself to an ethnographic methodology (a model which allows for no a priori hypothesis and which provides a forum for multiple perspectives), even that generous and complex perspective seems at times inadequate to convey the reality of change (Bogdan and Biklin, 1982; Bogdan, 1972; Goetz and LeCompte, 1984). As discussed in the final section of this article, despite the most intimate observation employing a range of ethnographic tools, the reasons for why the Quest program survived its first turbulent year remains ultimately elusive. Succumbing to the final mystery of such things may be one of the more interesting lessons learned in the process of our investigation. If, as Sarason and others have suggested, the school is "organic" in its nature, then there may exist elements in its "biology" that can only be attributed to a kind of vital force, unmeasurable with any instrument.

Another reason why faculty development efforts are not frequently told as realistic "stories" of change is, I believe, because of the natural hostility between the leaders of such efforts (teachers) and those who would tell their tales (researchers). Much has been

recently written about the delicate and uncomfortable relationship between these two constituencies and much advice has been given in overcoming this natural enmity (Campbell, 1988; Oakes, Hare, Sirotnik, 1986; Sirotnik and Goodlad, 1988). Donald Campbell's discussion of a 3-year collaboration between Michigan State and a local high school seems to characterize many of the problems inherent in endeavors to cooperate on such ventures. Campbell describes the miscommunication and unfounded assumptions of "hidden agendas" that emerged in the course of attempting to initiate a bottom-up program for school change driven by the inquiries of an outside researcher. The teachers with whom Campbell worked seemed to vacillate between distracted compliance and resistence, a pattern that seems endemic to these kinds of efforts. Indeed, of the few qualitative, longitudinal studies of school change that have been published recently, virtually all focus on just this issue--the problematic relationship of researcher to subject. At times, that preoccupation with the interpersonal can wholly upstage the original subject of scrutiny--the change effort itself.

Goals and Format of the Study

While the tribulations of school/college collaboration are discussed at several points in this article, they are not the central focus of the study. Instead, the goal of this study was to fill a conspicuous gap in the writing on teacher-initiated staff development: to present with candor the story of how one school

attempted to design and implement a single innovative program, working against the enormous handicaps (financing, scheduling difficulties, interpersonal disputes, etc.) that burden, at least to some extent, virtually every school engaged in such an endeavor (Muncey & McQuillan, 1991). The article seeks not to avoid discussion of the difficulties encountered along the way, but to enumerate and analyze them as part of the organic reality of school life and school reform. Though the "product" of these 2 1/2 years of work--the Quest Program itself--is far from being an exemplary one , the process we went through in achieving even limited success is, I contend, highly instructive.

The study is presented here in a format that seeks to retain a sense of the unfolding story of change. Instead of organizing the body of the article around the series of understandings gained in the course of our work, I chose instead a format increasingly common in ethnogrpahic studies (Hunsaker & Johnson, 1992); that is, to present first the full outline of what transpired, reserving analysis for the end of the article. In this way, the reader can hopefully experience something of the frustration and confusion we ourselves experienced in the course of our work. The study begins then with a discussion of the background and history of the changes presently being implemented in the high school; I describe the origins of our school/college partnership, explain the process through which we collaboratively developed an alternative, experimental curriculum, and then outline the problems and successes encountered in the first year of implementation. Following

this section, I present a series of "understandings" achieved in the course of our work.

Methodology

Data for this study were collected over a two and one half year period by this writer and one graduate research assistant. In an effort to achieve what Wolcott (1982) calls "thick description," researchers acted as participant observers in all planning sessions, workshops, and meetings beginning in the summer of 1990, and went on to participate on a daily basis in the classroom where the new curriculum was being implemented. Data collection ended in the spring of 1992 after the first full year of implementation. In addition to gathering traditional fieldnotes, taped transcripts were made of selective planning sessions and of the Quest classroom in operation. Taped interviews of participating teachers and students were gathered at three points during the year--in September, January and April. That material was coded along with fieldnotes under a series of expanding categories. Changes in student attitudes and understandings were charted as well through writing folders. In keeping with the technique of grounded theory, information was collected and analysed, tentative hypotheses were drawn, those hypotheses were tested in the field, revised, retested, and so forth (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This "pulsating" approach to data analysis allowed for the necessary flexibility required in so evolving and complex a subject. Triangulation was used to ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985); all interpretations were shared with another

researcher and with at least one member of the teacher team involved in the project.

The Story of Quest

The Site and the Participants

In the Spring of 1990, the faculty in the Department of Education at Smith College was approached by the town's new superintendent of schools. Concerned about the low morale and apparent inertia among teachers and administrators at the local high school, she made a general and unfocused request for help. There was interest, she claimed, on the part of a surprising number of teachers to establish a study group in collaboration with the faculty at the college. What was more, a handful of veterans in the school had become interested in the work of Ted Sizer, and were looking for a forum for discussing his ideas. Could we provide a site for both groups, and act as consultants for whatever projects emerged during the course of discussion? Two faculty from the Department of Education, my colleague Al Rudnitsky and I, agreed to her request. Our motives were both altruistic and self-serving: We knew well of the difficulties the high school was experiencing. For almost five years, the school had been receiving bad press in the local paper. Community consensus held that the institution was poorly managed, and the teachers were overpaid and lazy. The school, which had once been one of the premier high schools in the state, had been allowed to languish. By all conspicuous measures-- lower test scores, increasing attrition, and a falling off of the number of merit scholars--the school appeared to be in decline.

My colleague and I began our work with the sincere belief that the high school was, if not perfectible, then improvable. We were genuinely pleased to be able to help bring the school out of its protracted funk, knowing from personal experience (through student teacher placements and social interaction) of the talent that existed among the teaching staff. We welcomed too the possibility of improving the school for our own children who had suffered themselves from the poor teaching apparent in many classrooms. Finally, we saw the site and the invitation to participate as an interesting research opportunity.

One of the striking characteristics of the teachers who attended our first session was their age. These were not young mavericks, comfortable with risk-taking. Instead, the initial group was composed of veteran professionals, teachers with an average of 20 years in the system. They were teachers who were self-professed cynics, who had "seen reforms come and go from decade to decade," and who had managed to remain unchanged in the midst of so much ideological seesawing. It was several factors that brought these teachers to the point of committing themselves now to the possibility of reform: Morale in the school was very low; students were perceived as recalcitrant and lazy; there was little faith in the building's administration. The school boasted no shared philosophy or goals. "I feel," said one teacher in an early interview, "that if I don't take the bull by the horns now, if I don't try to do something different now, that I'm going to end up quitting.

I'm so bored and disaffected and burned out. I just can't stand it anymore."

With this general sentiment prevailing, 25 teachers, the principal, the superintendent, and the two Smith faculty began a monthly discussion group focusing first on general gripes and complaints, and then gradually focusing on more specific issues of curriculum renewal, including those laid out in the work of Ted Sizer. Within the group itself, several cliques quickly developed. The old guard, defensive of the school and its excellent history, tended to bristle at criticisms leveled by newer faculty. One group hoped to make small and incremental changes, while another hoped to completely "remake" the troubled institution. Foreign language teachers tended to band together, critical of what they perceived as condescension by other "core" departments. Monthly conversations tended to be fragmented and combative. College faculty grew confused over their role and confounded by the limitations of their own expertise. The only force which seemed to unite all teachers and college faculty consistently was a shared suspicion for the two administrators present. These administrators tended to sit back and say little, fearful of being "intrusive" or "manipulative." Despite their silence, however, the group seemed early-on to decide that the administration had a hidden agenda, and that both principal and superintendent were impatient with the slow progress of the work. After each formal meeting, during the first months of 1990, a debriefing

session would take place in which key teachers engaged in a kind of guessing game over the "real motives" of the inscrutable superintendent.

The First Step Forward

Despite their speculation, however, little progress was made in the first half of the year. Attendance continued to shrink in November, December, and January. Then, in February of 1991, a veteran English teacher who had taken on a leadership position in the group, arrived at the meeting with a proposal for an interdisciplinary curriculum pilot. The program, sketched out roughly on a yellow pad, attempted to bravely assimilate many of the Sizer-esque principles that had been under debate in the previous months. The plan called for a team of teachers, representing 4 or 5 different disciplines, to work together in designing an interdisciplinary course built around a common theme. The course would be offered to a group of 40-50 students, from a full range of ability levels, who would elect to take it in lieu of a conventional English and history course.

Still smarting from the months of stagnation, the 10 remaining teachers in the group decided immediately to adopt the plan. Indeed, all the group's participants--including the administrators and the Smith faculty--were delighted that something concrete had finally been suggested. Release time was granted to the ten teachers for the purpose of refining the new curriculum and readying it for implementation in the fall.

The ensuing months, from March to June, were devoted to the specific task of creating a curriculum based on the rough model presented by the English teacher. The five full-day meetings allocated for this task were among the most difficult of our collaboration. The first and most conspicuous problem to emerge was one of leadership. It was decided during the first planning session that the Quest program would be taught by all eight teachers, with two of those teachers functioning as "anchors" or "leaders." Anchor teachers would teach Quest as a fifth class. All other participating teachers would take the program on as a sixth class, doing less grading and actual instruction than the leaders. A secret ballot was held to choose the two Quest leaders, with two articulate English teachers winning by a small margin. Instead of moving things forward, however, the vote served to permanently darken the proceedings. A stubborn current of dissatisfaction took hold, as losing candidates lapsed into a protracted brood. Try as we all did to dispel it, this atmosphere of disappointment seemed to dog us throughout the spring, irritating those other difficulties that were bound to emerge.

Those other difficulties fell into two categories. The first of these was a problem of consensus. Visibly shaken by the leadership vote, the group soon after decided that all decisions with regard to the curriculum document would be made through consensus. This insistence on democratic agreement proved unbelievably unwieldy, with hours being

spent arguing minor details based on subtle ideological differences within the group. In many cases, the document's wording became so "nuetralized" (so as to appeal to all parties involved) that it ceased to mean anything at all. The rhythm of meetings tended to be laborious, and differences between teachers--and between teachers and Smith faculty--were exaggerated and distorted. The skill of dividing and delegating work (one that would prove vitally important during the first year of implementation) remained inadequately learned by all of us throughout the course of planning.

The second category of problem concerned the apparent language barrier between the high school and college faculty. Throughout the course of our collaborative curriculum design project, conflicts emerged in the way both constituencies (college and high school) used and understood the language of curriculum-making. Differences fell across predictable lines: Many of the teachers tended to imagine their work in more concrete terms ("What will we do Day One?" and "How will this activity fill 50 minutes?"), while the college faculty tended to be overly theoretical (an on-going argument about the differences between "skills" and "understandings", initiated by the college faculty, continued to confuse and frustrate a number of the teachers). In the end, the curriculum document emerged as a hodgepodge of the specific and the theoretical: Elaborate theoretical goal statements would be proceeded by concrete exercises.

In a general sense, the Quest curriculum that emerged subscribed to the principles of connectionism and critical problem-solving associated with Sizer's Essential Schools model. Students would be asked to think about the concept of "change" within the context of their own city. Students would study the workings of that city--its geographical, political, and economic characteristics--with the goal of designing their own model communities. Those newly-created communities would stand as the final "performance" for the year's work.

Logistically, in terms of scheduling, the Quest pilot emerged as very complex: Eight teachers from five different disciplines would work together in a double period block, with a shared planning period to be used for daily curriculum revising. The plan required that all eight teachers be free at the same time, and that the school's schedule be worked around the coordination of their free periods. The administration promised to accommodate these needs.

The year ended without great optimism. The curriculum had been finished, but all of us felt exhausted and uneasy. In late April, the superintendent had informed us that two in our ranks (both intelligent and even-headed group members) would be laid off because of massive budget cuts. Though the Quest curriculum had been designed through consensus, the teachers claimed to feel a curious detachment from the document. No one wanted to think too hard about what the following year would look like. No one was willing to meet during the summer for last minute revisions or discussion.

Implementation: September-December

The first days of school proved a great shock to the Quest teachers. Over the summer, the principal had put together a master schedule which 1. did not allow for the promised "shared planning time" for Quest teachers and 2. created scheduling conflicts for 4 out of 8 participating teachers, so that each of these four could spend only half the allotted time each day in the Quest classroom.

Angered and disoriented by the last minute changes, confused by their own curriculum document, and overwhelmed by the problems of 40 heterogeneously grouped 9th graders, the teachers and their program got off to a chaotic start. In an attempt to avoid grappling with the confusing curriculum document, teachers presented a problematic first unit entitled "Who am I?" which asked students to engage in soul-searching, and to write about their personal lives and feelings. For the majority of ninth graders, this kind of extended affective exercise was extremely threatening and geared, they claimed, for "3rd graders." By October, a number of students had dropped out of the program. Monthly parent meetings were set up, but these often became gripe sessions in which teachers were forced to justify their work to skeptical parents.

A second unexpected problem emerged on an interpersonal level. The two lead teachers in the group developed a serious personality conflict, a conflict founded in their two essentially different styles of

teaching. One, a traditionalist, found the informality and disorder of the Quest classroom unacceptable. Comfortable only with a structured planning style, she could not tolerate the make-shift, improvisational format of the course. The second lead teacher had an informal and open-ended style. He believed in a democratically run classroom, had a high tolerance for ambiguity in lesson design and had a horror of conventional disciplinary procedures. Students quickly sensed the contradictions between the two teachers and exploited them.

A class session viewed in late 1991 seemed to characterize all that had gone awry in the Quest program. The class began with the more progressive of the lead teachers explaining to the students that they would be engaging that day in a discussion of why the discipline in the room was so bad. "We want to hear what you have to say. If one of us makes you angry, tell us. If there's something we can do better, let us know. We're here for you." The group of already loose-reigned ninth graders responded with a deluge of accusations and recriminations, most of them directed towards the traditional teacher in the group. "We hate her," yelled one boy. "Yeah, get rid of that one!" others chimed in. The eight teacher stood silently as students continued to call out for half an hour. At the end of this time, grumbling but spent, the class moved on to a vocabulary test.

This practice of unfocused criticism emerged as a frequent part of the class, and was rationalized as promoting student self-esteem and confidence. Interviews with students performed in mid-January,

however, suggested the opposite. Students felt frightened and confused by the class commotion--even those who tended to lead it. They worried that they were learning "nothing," and would fall behind friends in traditional classes. Quest teachers had attempted to organize most activities around a cooperative learning technique, and students resented and ridiculed the poorly monitored format. "One teacher tells you one thing. Another tells you another," said one student who soon after dropped the program. "There are conflicting demands and its very upsetting to me."

The Slow Climb Back

At their lowest point, in mid-January of 1992, teachers gathered at Smith College to try to understand what had gone wrong. Their problems were clear: 1. They had been let down by the administration by being denied a common planning period. 2. They were incapable--because of ideological differences-- of coming to consensus on daily issues of discipline and lesson procedures. 3. They were exhausted by the enormity of their task and the demands of a six-class work day.

From the start of implementation, the concerns of the college faculty and the high school faculty seemed to diverge. While teachers were involved with interpersonal and structural issues, college faculty were interested in curriculum, and blamed the breakdown of discipline on a failure to engage students in meaningful work. At meetings like the one in January, one group would grow impatient while the other lectured

on the "real problem.". Teachers felt abandoned by the Smith faculty, while the Smith faculty felt annoyed and frustrated with the anti-intellectual content of the program and the teachers' seemingly petty squabbles.

By February, however, a key problem suddenly solved itself. One of the two lead teachers--the traditionalist--quit the program, leaving the ideological reigns to the other. Without the constant tension of opposing viewpoints, the atmosphere in the classroom quickly improved. A sudden optimism seemed to take hold of the group, which in turn seemed to embolden them intellectually. With only one teacher now calling the shots, curriculum decisions were made with ease. The city project got underway, and students seemed to respond to the new work with some enthusiasm. Though classwork still moved at a snail's pace, students seemed more comfortable with their assignments. In interviews, several articulated the goals of the class with new clarity.

By late February, five student groups had been formed, each having devised a city charter, constructed a relief map, and developed a history for their city. A visit to the Quest classroom at this time showed students bent in clusters of 5 or 6 over their 6-foot relief maps, arguing about the efficacy of building shopping malls and superhighways. While some students still lingered idly in the corners of the room, a majority of students now seemed to participate with some energy and pleasure. In mid- March, luck continued to fall Quest's way: The former mayor, now retired, volunteered to spend every morning in the

Quest classroom, sharing his expertise on city planning and politics. With him he brought an array of current and retired city officials, who lectured to the students on city finances and the development of public works. While many of these activities were presented without a lead-in or with little follow-up, there was a sense among all involved that something "real" was finally happening. Certain students began to blossom, with great spurts of improvement happening in those who had begun the year most disaffected and unhappy. A final "performance" in May, when Quest students presented their finished cities to parents and friends at an evening gala, turned out to be quite successful. Students seemed to display great pride in even their humblest achievements, and several spoke impressively about their projects.

Teachers too seem to have come a distance. By May, almost all of the teachers still involved in Quest hoped to participate in the program the following year. Experience, however, had taught them that the schedule and the budget could not accommodate 8 subject area teachers being scheduled at the same time. It was decided, finally, that Quest would continue with only three teachers, a history, an English, and a reading teacher. Others pledged to try to bring some of the lessons they have gleaned about interdisciplinary teaching and cooperative learning back into their own classrooms.

Some Understandings About School Change and Collaboration

1. The Difficult Road Towards Progress

As the preceding description makes abundantly clear, the Quest program's path towards progress in school reform in the past two years was neither smooth nor linear. At virtually every step along the way small victories were constantly muted by set-backs, successes by disappointments. Just at the moment when our work had gathered the greatest momentum, budget cuts ravaged the program; just at the point of beginning the new pilot, scheduling conflicts undermined its effective implementation. Similarly, it was impossible to predict or control the periodic bursts of creativity and productivity on the part of the teachers. Long periods of quibbling and inefficiency would be punctuated by sudden epiphanies when things would "miraculously" come together.

Joseph MacDonald (1991) has noted that the most potent driving force in creating change in schools may be the phenomenon of "crisis," when negative factors finally force players to blast through their natural lethargy. This theory seems to explain, at least in part, something of the pattern established by the Quest group. Though crises did not always manifest themselves as rowdy arguments, intolerable boredom and impatience sometimes seemed to push things forward.

Still, it is hard not to see the ultimate success of this program more in terms of lucky breaks than of purposeful program design. The presence of the mayor and the disappearance of a lead teacher

seems to have done as much for the program's survival than any calculated decision made by the participants.

2. The Centrality of Interpersonal Issues

At the start of this enterprise, none of us could have predicted that personality issues would so dominate and inhibit our work. Power struggles, among group members, between high school and college faculty, and between members and other teachers in the school, were a habitual preoccupation. Not discussed here, but of real importance to the group, were the many sessions spent brooding over rumors and misinformation spread by teachers outside of Quest. The group agonized often about their own stance vis-a-vis the rest of the school: Would they be seen as pawns of the administration? Would they be perceived as elitist? Smith faculty initially tended to dismiss these fears as unimportant, but came to see that they were indeed issues with which all must grapple. Many of the fears were well-founded, and needed to be talked out if the group was to be productive. Ultimately we came to accept that for every hour of constructive work, we would need an hour of "therapy"--or what we came to call "debriefing."

From the college faculty's perspective, the most painful interpersonal issue was certainly the growing hostility between ourselves and the struggling Quest teachers. As daily sessions in the Quest classroom degenerated, our presence as researchers became a source of resentment and anger. Teachers came to see themselves as "guinea

pigs," a term actually used by one of the teachers in an interview in late 1991. For Al Rudnitsky and me, these dark months were also depressing and frustrating. Our expertise was in curriculum design, and our experience with the optimistic literature on school change had not prepared us in the least for the complex interpersonal issues that we encountered. Neither my colleague nor I knew how to alter the role into which we were cast once difficulties were encountered: First, we were seen as saviors; and then when our advice proved faulty or too difficult to implement, we were seen as betrayers and opportunists. Throughout the course of our collaboration, there seemed to be no middle ground between these two positions.

3. Defining Collaboration

One of the reasons for this unrealistic perception of our role stems, I believe, from the still-problematic definition of collaboration. Much has been written about the fine distinction between "collaboration" and "cooperation" (Townsend, 1992; Campbell, 1988; Clark, 1988; Hord, 1986; Hord, 1980; Hoyt, 1978), with a good deal of this literature offering fine-tuned definitions of one or the other. According to Hoyt and others, "collaboration implies taking joint responsibility and authority for basic policy decision-making." Cooperation, on the other hand, assumes two distinct and autonomous interests, often with separate programs, who agree to work together to make each program successful. Collaboration, in short, seems to suggest the setting aside of individual purposes for a larger, singular good;

what Hannay and Stevens (1984) call "the bracketing of respective egos," in the face of a shared goal. Cooperation implies no such restraints on the ego.

Despite the College's professed altruistic desire to "collaborate" in helping the high school improve itself, I believe now that our true intentions were never more than to "cooperate" towards that end. From the moment we decided to do research on the evolving Quest curriculum, our agenda became distinct and autonomous from that of our high school colleagues. Indeed, I have come to feel deeply skeptical about the possibility of real collaboration taking place whenever research is being performed by one of the collaborating parties. Smith faculty had neither the time nor the inclination to slog through the tortuous daily work of salvaging Quest. We offered our advice and made ourselves "available," but had far less stake in the program's success than did the teachers.

This point leads to another related one: For many months during the design stage of Quest, the two Smith faculty members attempted to stand clear of all central decision-making. Schooled in the principles of bottom-up, grassroots reform, and believing in the "wisdom of practice" (Shulman, 1986), we saw our role in the collaboration--even in its most generous sense-- as facilitators, consultants, and cheerleaders. We would advise when we were asked, but would never "impose" our ideas on the teachers, despite the fact that my colleague had written a seminal book on the very subject under discussion--how to

make an interdisciplinary curriculum. I have come to feel that this kind of willful distancing can be as damaging to school change as old-style top-down mandates used to be. Many of the false starts and curricular bungles could have been corrected or averted had we Smith faculty the courage, the commitment, and self-confidence to step in at an earlier point. The Quest teachers--devoted as they were--hadn't the time or background to devise a curriculum which sought to juggle so many disparate variables: two periods, eight teachers, five disciplines, 4 ability levels. They needed aggressive direction...even though they didn't always ask for it, and seemed resistent to accept it during difficult periods.

4. <u>You Get What You Pay For</u>

One of the most dramatic changes observed over the course of the first year came at the start of our third group session in September. This was the first session to coincide with the regular school calendar. The amazing shift we saw was in energy and affect--from full-throttle to low-gear. Once school had begun i.e. once teachers were coming to our afternoon meetings having already taught five classes, their appetite for making creative decisions and engaging in meaningful discourse was virtually nonexistent. Even the brief readings that were assigned for these sessions were completed by few, if any, of the participants. It was only when district release time afforded teachers full days for work that progress on the curriculum could begin.

Nothing comes for free. In listing truisms about school-university partnerships, Goodlad and Sirotnik (1988) underscored this fact, and in so doing, reinforce our own experience with Quest: To ask teachers to develop a sixth innovative course while laboring with their traditional five-course program is to court failure. The terrible malaise that settled on the Quest teachers in the first months of this year's implementation was grounded in large part in the fact that there was simply not enough release time afforded them to do their work. In mid-February, when schedules were manipulated so as to create a common lunch period for the Quest teachers, and their "duty" assignments were taken away, the program darted forward with renewed energy. Similarly, the monthly meetings at Smith continued to draw weary teachers to them as much for the serious discourse there as for the elegant buffet lunches we provided, the white tablecloth and real silver. These small, costly perks became symbols of hope and optimism for the teachers--denoting the fact that money and power were behind them. It is easy for an outsider to overlook the critical importance of such factors as time and aesthetics, when they are certainly among the central factors in insuring success.

5. The Dilemma of Goals

A whole range of persistent and evolving problems in Quest seemed to center around the subject of goals. Goal-setting emerged as a point of controversy from the very start of our work, and a confusion

over goals has dogged the implementation stage of the Quest program even to the present.

Much of the wariness directed towards the superintendent and principal during our earliest discussion group sessions centered around a mistrust of their "secret goals." It was clear from the beginning that the superintendent, in particular, was anxious to come to closure on an agenda for reform. Perhaps typical of her cohort, this administrator was concerned with bottom line returns (a small monetary investment had been made in the group which, during a time of very tight budgeting, may have aggravated her sense of how quickly things should move), and her own style of decision-making was decisive and rapid-fire. Though she spoke little, the superintendent still clearly communicated her impatience with the often circular or meandering talk that characterized the early months of our work. "Set some clear goals," she implored at a meeting in late November of 1991, "and I'll make sure you can move forward. But I can't help you if you don't decide on a concrete plan." Her fear was understandable, since it was well known that local teachers had formed discussion groups like this one countless times before. Nothing of substance had ever emerged.

The teachers' internal change clock, however, bore little resemblance to the superintendent's. Since, for many, the very idea of change was threatening, setting specific goals proved almost impossible. When goals were eventually set--by the English teacher's ambitious Quest curriculum--they were accepted as much out of exhaustion and relief than

out of consenual understanding. Teachers had only a fuzzy sense of why these particular goals were being pursued, a fact that made itself clear again and again during the full-day curriculum-writing sessions. And the confused goals were again manifest in the daily workings of Quest. "Why are we doing this?" students asked repeatedly of every exercise and project presented to them. Indeed, the question became the leitmotif of the course.

There is a wealth of literature on goal-setting in staff development, all of which reinforces its critical place in the change process. Recent case studies of Coalition schools (Muncey and McQuillan, 1991), however, show that getting large groups of teachers to not only agree upon but to act upon theoretical goal statements may actually be impossible--and certainly impossible within the rushed time frame of most superintendents. Only now, after a year of painful, and often directionless implementation, are Quest's goals beginning to emerge--and they are far more humble in their scope than anything the group would have been satisfied with at the start.

It is difficult to know what lesson to draw from this: Had we not forged forward blindly, unsure of our real goals, our discussion sessions would surely have peetered out over time. But on the other hand, implementing Quest without a clear grasp of what we hoped to accomplish led to a difficult, chaotic year ("The hardest of my career," in the words of one of the lead teachers) and an end project that is still deeply flawed.

Conclusion

The ordeal of the Quest program is a specific but not an idiosyncratic story. At a recent annual conference of the New England Educational Research Organization, in a session entitled "Collaboration: In Theory and Practice," college reformers, like so many ancient mariners, swarmed to the podium to exchange desperate tales. There is a great thirst, it seems, for real and compelling cases of struggle in school change efforts; not prescription or advice, but rather a consoling and confirming eye.

For those already engaged in this kind of collaborative (or cooperative) work, the evolution of the Quest program may hold a much-needed mirror up to reality. For those thinking of embarking on such a project, it is hoped that our story may serve if not as "inspirational literature," than at least as a rough roadmap of what is to come.

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